

Coordinator educates about disability programs

BY JENNIFER E. WEST
NUCLEUS STAFF WRITER

“The one goal I have is to educate supervisors and employees—military and civilian,” explained Thomas Lujan, the new People with Disabilities coordinator for Kirtland AFB. An employee with a disability himself, Lujan knows first-hand the difficulties that may confront a person with some form of disability. And, he also understands that employers don’t always know ways to enable a potentially excellent employee who has a disability to take jobs they have available.

“There are programs out there funded by the government, such as computer programs (and) different types of training...that we can get here at Kirtland by applying,” Lujan said.

Lujan’s job, he explained, will be to recruit supervisors with jobs that can be filled by people with disabilities using viable compensations that enable the employee to not only do a job but to do it successfully. Those compensations, he added, might be as simple as allowing a break for a diabetic person who had administered medication or as complex as a special computer that “hears” and types the words of a physically disabled worker. When supervisors understand they can open this new pool of applicants to their workforce, Lujan said, they will discover a group of employees who are “very dedicated” and “highly motivated.”

Lujan wanted the coordinator job because he has personally experienced the obstacles faced by people with disabilities and persistently seeks answers to workplace questions relating to disabilities.

“If you can help somebody else like I was at 16 years old, when I lost my arm, to get started...I had no direction. A young kid with one arm—where do you go?” he said.

“It’s all education. If I can educate (a supervisor) and somebody comes to their door (for a job) and



Photo by Lisa Gonzales
Thomas Lujan, People with Disabilities coordinator

they have a need, we can help them,” he said. “Everybody has a son or a daughter, or an aunt or uncle who gets hurt, so you can throw this information out there and they can grab it.”

Throughout his 21-year employment at Kirtland AFB, Lujan has asked questions and researched what is available to him as a person with a disability. As the program’s coordinator, he hopes to continue

learning and to share his findings with others who can use the information in their career goals and dreams and with those who can open doors for employees with disabilities.

The people Lujan hopes to help includes not only those with disabilities that limit mobility like loss of a limb, but also people who are blind, have dyslexia, mental disabilities, speech or hearing difficulties—just about any disability you can imagine.

Lujan’s education goal includes the people he wants to help as potential employers.

“There are more programs out there but people are afraid to get them,” he explained. “They don’t want to say ‘I have this problem or that problem.’”

Determined not to allow his disability to impede his career progress, Lujan began his work at Kirtland AFB as a Commissary cashier in a similar program to the one he now heads. As he proved his ability to do the work, his job was extended. And, in time, he sought new responsibility, moving to work in the warehouse.

Today Lujan is a federal employee working as a heavy equipment operator at Vehicle Operations in the Logistics Readiness Squadron.

Lujan will volunteer 30 percent of his working hours to the coordinator position. In the near future, an e-mail address dedicated to the People with Disabilities position will be created. Until then, supervisors and employees can reach him at thomas.lujan@kirtland.af.mil.

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The effort to educate the American public about issues related to disability and employment began in 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to "National Disability Awareness Month."

Kirtland gets ready for NDEAM: National Disability Employment Awareness Month

- Each October Team Kirtland has an opportunity to formally acknowledge the valuable contributions disabled employees make to the Air Force and the nation. This year's theme is highly appropriate, "America Works Best When All Americans Work".
- We invite you to participate in the many informative and challenging events scheduled for **NDEAM** this October.

➤ **Oct. 10: Fun Run at Hardin Field 9 a.m.**

- **Free T-shirts to first 50 participants!**
- **Contact Tech. Sgt. Robert Herring for details 846-1102**

➤ **Oct. 22: North 4H Arts Program for Challenged Artists**

- Consolidated Support Building, Room 120, noon-1 p.m., bring your own Lunch. Contact Bernice Reed for details 846-2449

➤ **Oct. 31: Luncheon at Mountain View Club.**

- Guest Speaker Dr. Roy Grizzard, Secretary Office of Disabled Employment Policy/Undersecretary of Labor.
Menu: choice of sliced turkey or vegetarian plate: Cost: \$10

➤ **For tickets contact :**

- **Brian (Allen) Ayers (377 LRS) 853-8355**
- **Tech. Sgt. Rob Fagnant (550th SOS) 853-4010**
- **Tech. Sgt. Robert Herring (377 SVS) 846-1102**
- **Master Sgt. Wendy Herring (377 SVS) 846-7479**
- **Capt. Joe Howard (550th SOS) 853-4006**
- **Donald Orona (DTRA) 846-8601**
- **Bernice Reed (58 MOS) 846-2449**
- **Teresita Sanchez (377 CCX) 846-1768**
- **Capt. Eric Stephan (377 MDOS) 846-3151**
- **2nd Lt. James Walsh (377 SFS) 846-8141**
- **Tech. Sgt. Elizabeth Wills (377 CONS) 846-7691**

➤ **Questions? Call Capt. Joe Howard 853-4006**